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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (7/30): Demolition of Palestinian homes, construction of settlements

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Main Stories:  
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All the dailies lead with news about the launching of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in Washington on July 30 under American sponsorship, with the goal of reaching a comprehensive peace agreement in 2008, based on President Bush's vision of establishing an independent Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security. In its reporting on the issue, Al-Quds claims that the Palestinian public is pessimistic about the outcome of the talks. In related coverage, Al-Quds quotes Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that "a peace agreement in the Middle East by the end of this year will be difficult," while Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida quote her as saying, "the Middle East will not improve unless a Palestinian state is established; Washington is annoyed by the Israeli settlement activity 'problem.'" Al-Ayyam also reports on its exclusive phone interview with Palestinian Chief Negotiator Dr. Sa'eb Erekat on July 29, in which he asserted that the Palestinian delegation in Washington informed American officials that the situation is difficult and that the Israeli actions are destroying the options for peace.

All the dailies report that one child was killed and twelve people were injured by Israeli forces in Ni'lin village near Ramallah on July 29 during a demonstration against the separation barrier. Al-Ayyam leads with a prominent above-the fold photo of the body of nine-year old victim Ahmad Husam Mousa being taken to an ambulance after he was shot by Israeli soldiers, while Al-Hayat Al-Jadida carries an above-the-fold photo of the young victim's bloodied body upon arrival at a Ramallah hospital. The dailies also report on the Israeli incursion into Nablus city on July 29, during which Israeli forces bombed and burned down a large mall, causing \$30 million in damage, as reported to the media by the owner of the building.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that nine people were also arrested during the Israeli incursion into Nablus. All dailies cover statements made by Israeli President Shimon Peres on Israeli Radio on July 29 that a "wall" should be established between Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem to prevent further Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the city.

Coverage of the mutual arrest campaigns being carried out by Fatah and Hamas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip dominates the front pages of the three dailies. Al-Quds reports that "the mutual arrest campaigns increase tension between Fatah and Hamas," citing a statement sent by Hamas to the Palestinian Authority (PA) police on July 29 in which Hamas threatened to carry out reprisals in the West Bank to "avenge" the arrests of its members in the West Bank by Fatah. Al-Quds leads with an above-the-fold photo of Palestinians demonstrating in the Gaza Strip on July 29 against the wave of arrests. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida writes, "Fatah and Hamas continue their verbal war due to the mutual arrest campaigns" and Al-Ayyam reports that "Hamas police forces continue their control over 159 institutions in the Gaza Strip for the fourth consecutive day."

The dailies report that a Palestinian official announced on July 29 to the media that PA President Mahmoud Abbas does not intend to meet any Hamas leaders in Egypt and that Hamas' visit to Egypt on July 28 is not related to internal Palestinian talks or with Abbas' visit to Cairo. All dailies state that Hamas' visit to Cairo is related to a prisoners' exchange deal with Israel which would include the Israeli soldier Shalit.

Palestinian and European sources report on July 29 that Palestinian

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Premier Salam Fayyad has asked the World Bank for assistance in obtaining urgent financial support from donor countries in order to pay the salaries of PA employees.

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11. Independent Al-Quds runs its daily editorial entitled, "With what right are Palestinian houses destroyed?" (7/30): "It has become impossible to tolerate the official international, Arab and Palestinian silence regarding the Israeli Authority's actions of planned and intensive demolition operations against Palestinian houses in the West Bank and especially in East Jerusalem. The latest of these operations was the destruction of the Abu Eisha building [in Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem] which housed over 60 people. In the eyes of the international community, Israel is an occupying power and does not have the legal authorization to destroy houses, since such destruction violates international law ... The Israeli Authority destroys the houses of the Palestinian people with one hand and constructs houses for settlers with the other ... In many cases, [Palestinian] people build houses on their own lands with their own money after losing hope of ever obtaining a building license. Such licenses require dozens of approvals from various Israeli departments and each department charges thousands of shekels to consider the request. Even if approval is granted, it takes many months of communication and follow-up with each individual department ... And if an applicant is denied a license, he receives instead a demolition order, despite having spent huge sums of money ... The question is, if the end goal [the demolition order] is to be executed in any case, why do people have to pay all this money? And what is odd is that the [Israeli] municipality requests that the owner of the house pay the cost of having his own house demolished ... This is the extent to which [Israel] undermines the feelings, nerves and rights of the Palestinian people..."

12. Independent Al-Ayyam carries its daily editorial by Hani Al-Masri entitled, "The Gaza beach crime: a step towards the unknown or the beginning of a solution?" (7/30): "...who is the beneficiary of the crime? ... No one can deny that the occupation is the first and biggest beneficiary of this crime because the victims from the Al-Qassam Brigades are targeted by Israel...and because the Palestinian political and geographic division is in Israel's

interest and yields huge advantages ... Israel benefits from the infighting between 'brothers' and continues with its expansionist, racist, and settlement plans. The Palestinian divisions and the fact that they are pre-occupied with self-destruction ... exempt Israel from its responsibilities and commitments and prove to the world that [the Palestinian people] are not worthy of being granted an independent Palestinian state ... He who really wants to hold dialogue, and really desires dialogue, should prove that by actions and not by words, and by suggesting initiatives even if they originate with only one side [faction]. This will embarrass the other side and force it to either respond or reveal itself to the world as being ineffectual and weak ... The division is destructive to the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian national project and the Palestinian people. Only unity is capable of opening a way to resist the occupation and achieve freedom, the right to return [of Palestinian refugees], and independence. So, shall we learn this lesson before it is too late?"

WALLES